

# Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos

SAT or ACT. With these alternative assessments, students who have the skills and knowledge but who may struggle with paper-and-pencil tests will not be unfairly prevented from graduating with their peers.

- Community college pathway: The House of Representatives passed legislation to enable students who have met all state and local graduation requirements, but not the WASL by the end of high school, an opportunity to earn their diploma at a community college. This is an important option for students who have limited English proficiency. The Senate failed to pass this proposal so we will try again next session.

## Health Care

Families and seniors are struggling to cope with rising health care costs. Without adequate health care coverage, many problems remain untreated until a visit to the emergency room. This session, we invested in health care to provide relief for families and the most vulnerable members of our communities.



- About 6,500 low-income adults will be added to the state's Basic Health Plan and 5,500 children to the Children's Health Plan.
- We eliminated the Medicaid Part D co-payments for low-income or disabled individuals and we repealed the nursing home

bed tax that costs each resident almost \$2,000 a year.

- We provided funding to increase the number of low-income, uninsured women screened through the Washington Breast and Cervical Cancer program.

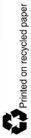


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End of Session  
Report  
to the 37<sup>th</sup> District

Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos

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## End of Session Report to the 37<sup>th</sup> District

Rep. Sharon  
Tomiko Santos



Dear neighbors,

I am pleased to report the 2006 legislative session resulted in many accomplishments that will improve the quality of life for Washington families. We passed a fiscally responsible supplemental budget that saves for the future and invests in priorities that cannot wait until we reconvene next year.

In this newsletter, I report on some of the highlights of the session, including our efforts to strengthen education, to make health care accessible and affordable, and to promote job growth and a healthy economy.

Despite the short 60-day session, the Legislature also enacted:

- Historic breakthroughs on anti-discrimination legislation, medical malpractice, unemployment insurance, and water management;
- A deposit in the state Housing Trust Fund for affordable housing needs;
- The Veterans Innovation Program to help veterans get jobs, training, and education who have returned to their families and communities after serving in recent military action;
- New oil spill prevention measures and an effort to cleanup Puget Sound.

As always, I am honored to represent you in Olympia. I enjoyed hearing from many of you during the legislative session and I welcome your thoughts on what we accomplished this year.

Sharon Tomiko Santos  
State Representative

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Committees:

- Education
- Finance
- Financial Institutions & Insurance
- Rules

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## Unclaimed money that belongs to you...

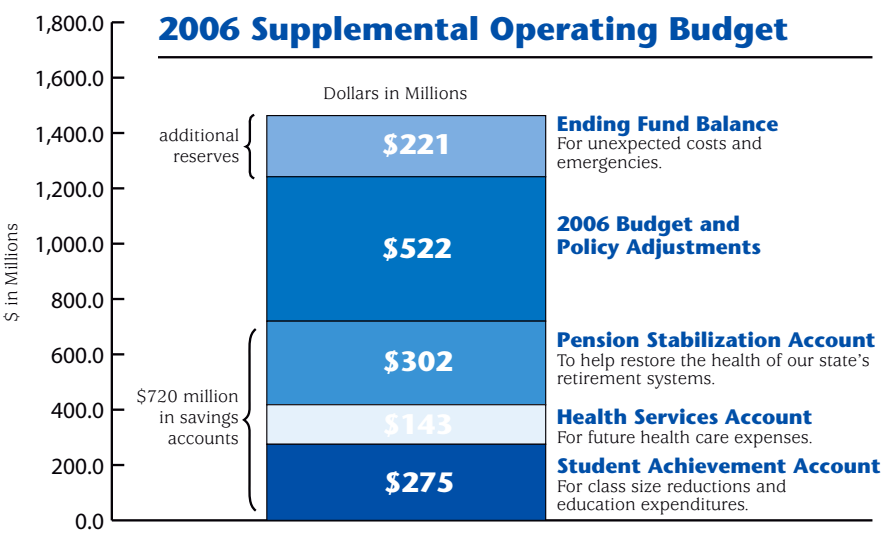
The state Department of Revenue (DOR) has created a website for residents to check for unclaimed property that is turned over to the state from banks, retailers, utilities, government entities and corporations. DOR has received more than \$450 million in unclaimed property since 1955. Call 1-800-435-2429 or visit <http://ucp.dor.wa.gov> to see if you have any unclaimed money that belongs to you.

Supplemental Budget

Washington State operates on a two-year budget cycle approved every odd-numbered year. The biennial budget sets the state’s priorities in key areas such as education, health care, public safety and transportation. The supplemental budget is an interim opportunity to make adjustments to the biennial budget to account for higher costs and to address critical priorities that cannot wait until we write the 2007-09 budget next year.

Our state’s strong housing market helped produce nearly \$1.6 billion in revenue that exceeded our projections. However, slowing home sales indicate that this revenue is not expected to continue, prompting Governor Chris Gregoire to call for fiscal restraint during this supplemental budget year despite the large surplus.

We responded by adopting a 2006 supplemental budget that makes targeted investments, restores some of the cuts from prior years to vital services, and saves a substantial portion of the surplus for the future. We saved \$941 million in special purpose reserves for education, health care and pensions costs anticipated in the next biennium, and left a sizable ending fund balance for unexpected emergencies.



Jobs and the Economy

A strong business climate and good paying jobs drive growth in our state. Promoting economic development on both sides of the state and helping families secure living wage jobs is the goal of several measures signed into law this year.

**Unemployment Insurance Reform:** Our state’s unemployment insurance system provides an important safety net for laid off workers. Changes in the system during the past several years contributed to imbalances for business and for workers. This year, we reached a bipartisan compromise agreement that provides better benefits for employees and a fairer assessment system for employers.

**Home-grown fuels:** The recent run-up in gasoline and energy prices prompted efforts to move our state toward energy independence. To stimulate home-grown production of alternative fuels, we approved a

measure that requires diesel fuel to include 2 percent biodiesel and requires gasoline to include 2 percent ethanol beginning in 2008. These requirements will lead to cleaner air and “recycles” dollars we spend on oil back into our state’s economy.

**Apprenticeships:** We created an Opportunity Grants program to give workers access to job training and to help employers find skilled employees.

**Tax incentives:** We approved more than \$50 million in tax incentives to promote economic development and to bring new jobs to our state. We authorized the implementation of the Local Infrastructure Financing Tool (LIFT) with important safeguards to protect against abuse to help local governments revive neighborhoods and attract new businesses. We increased the personal-property tax exemption for small businesses to \$15,000 from \$3,000, which was last raised in 1988. We also approved legislation to examine more than 400 tax preferences to determine if they still benefit the public.



Education

The goal of our education system is to provide the skills and knowledge needed for all children to succeed in today’s increasingly complex and globalized world. Last year, we launched Washington Learns, an 18-month study to develop recommendations to reform all levels of education from early learning to higher education.



This session, we acted on the Washington Learns interim recommendations by establishing a new Department of Early Learning and by providing help for students to pass the WASL.

Education Ombudsman

In 1993, this state began a long, arduous process to transform our system of public education into a high-performance, results-oriented engine of academic achievement for all students. However, while much of the work to implement education reform has focused on setting high academic standards, developing valid and reliable testing instruments, and aligning curricula and instruction to the new standards, parents and the public have been largely left to figure out the new system on their own.

This year, the Legislature reaffirmed our original commitment to improve student learning with parents as “primary partners in the education of their children” by establishing an Education Ombudsman program through the State Board of Education. The Ombudsman serves as a resource and as an advocate for students, families, and the public by:

- Increasing meaningful family and community engagement in public education;
- Identifying and eliminating barriers and obstacles to meaningful family and community involvement in our schools; and

- Helping to resolve complaints against schools and districts at the lowest level of contention.

Modeled on the very successful Long-Term Care Ombudsman program that has been in place for 20 years, the Education Ombudsman program will help parents and families understand how to best contribute to the academic achievement of our students.

Graduation Standards

Students across Seattle and Renton are awaiting results of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) to be released in June. The 84,000 students in line to graduate in 2008 are the first who must pass the test before receiving their diplomas. As a member of the House Education Committee, I have concerns about how the test will impact students who are not on track to graduate with their peers.

This session, we discussed many proposals to address my concerns and the issues raised by parents and students about the WASL. We approved the following measures to give all students, including those with diverse backgrounds, interests and learning styles, an opportunity to demonstrate they can meet our rigorous high school graduation requirements.

- **Learning assistance:** We provided \$28 million for school districts to offer after-school, Saturday classes, and summer school programs to help students learn the basic skills needed to pass the WASL.
- **Alternative assessments:** We approved four alternative assessments to give students multiple ways to show they can meet our high school graduation requirements. These options include a comparison of GPA in core classes, a portfolio of student work, and scores on the



The Seattle Nisei Veterans Committee and family members joined Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos, Rep. Bob Hasegawa, First Gentleman Mike Gregoire, and Director of Veterans Affairs John Lee for the Day of Remembrance in Olympia.